

John Smith

Screening at Jewish Museum, Paris 6/10/18

#### Biography –

John Smith's films and videos, known for their formal ingenuity, anarchic wit and oblique narratives, create mysterious and sometimes fantastical scenarios from the raw material of everyday life. Over five decades he has developed an extensive and varied body of work that defies easy classification, blurring the perceived boundaries between documentary and fiction, representation and abstraction.

John Smith was born in Walthamstow, east London in 1952 and studied film at the Royal College of Art. Since 1972 he has made over fifty film, video and installation works that have been widely shown internationally in gallery, cinema and television contexts and awarded major prizes at many international film festivals. He received the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists in 2011, and in 2013 he was the winner of Film London's Jarman Award. Recent solo exhibitions include Alma Zevi, Venice (2017); Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2017, 2015, 2013, 2012, 2010); Kate MacGarry, London (2016); Museum of Contemporary Art, Leipzig (2015); Centre d'Art Contemporain de Noisy-le-Sec, Paris (2014); The Gallery, Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle upon Tyne (2014); Figge von Rosen Gallery, Cologne (2013); Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2012); Turner Contemporary, Margate (2012) and Weserburg Museum for Modern Art, Bremen (2012). His work is held in the public collections of Tate Gallery; Arts Council England; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunstmuseum Magdeburg; FRAC Île de France; Ferens Art Gallery, Hull and Wolverhampton Art Gallery.

#### Screening programme –

Om

1986, 4 mins, 16mm transferred to HD video

<https://vimeo.com/34553419>

"This four minute film explores our response to stereotypes - aural, visual and ideological. The structure is stunningly simple and deceptively subtle. We are taken on a journey from one concrete stereotype to its diametric opposite, as images transform and juxtapose to, ultimately, invert our interpretation of what we see and hear." Gary Davis, 1990

Gargantuan

1992, 1 min, 16mm transferred to HD video, French subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/147873278>

"A wonderfully witty example of how to conduct pillow talk with a small amphibian." Elaine Paterson, Time Out 1992

### The Girl Chewing Gum

1976, 12 mins, 16mm transferred to HD video, French subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/89431126>

"In The Girl Chewing Gum a commanding voice over appears to direct the action in a busy London street. As the instructions become more absurd and fantasised, we realise that the supposed director (not the shot) is fictional; he only describes - not prescribes - the events that take place before him." A.L. Rees, A Directory of British Film & Video Artists, 1995

John Smith gives a brief introduction to his work (5 mins)

### Blight

1994-96, 14 mins, 16mm transferred to HD video, French subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/147750632>

"A stunning montage depicts the destruction of a London street to make way for new roads. The rhythmic, emotive soundtrack is partly musical and partly a collage of the residents' voices. Shots and sounds echo and cross-link in the film's 14 minutes to reinvent a radical documentary tradition." A.L. Rees, A History of Experimental Film and Video, 1999

### White Hole

2104, 7 mins, HD video, French subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/128063169>

Recalling visits to Poland and the former East Germany many years later, White Hole questions our imaginings of life in other places, times and political systems, mirroring its narrative through its form.

### Dad's Stick

2012, 5 mins, HD video, French subtitles

<https://vimeo.com/147750631>

"Dad's Stick is a lovely tribute to Smith's father, but it's also a witty game of form. What seems at first to be a voluptuous abstract painting turns out to be something more mundane, but now mysterious in its accidental beauty." David Bordwell, An Evening with Mr Smith, Birkbeck Cinema, 2015

### Steve Hates Fish

2015, 5 mins, HD video

<https://vimeo.com/145919418>

Filmed directly from the screen of a smartphone using a language translator app that has been told to translate from French into English, Steve Hates Fish deliberately confuses the software by instructing it to interpret the English signage in a busy London shopping street.

### Song for Europe

2017, 4 mins, HD video

<https://vimeo.com/233637741>

An underwater celebration of Britain's connection to mainland Europe.

(total running time 52 minutes)